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The Lost Age of Reason: Navya Nyāya and Indian Modernity

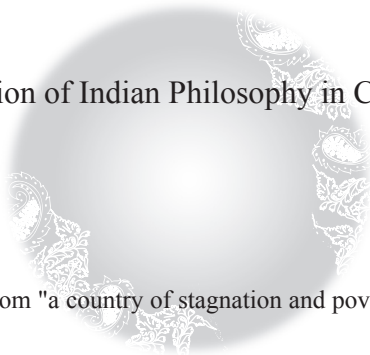
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The Living Tradition of Indian Philosophy in Contemporary India



The image of India has recently shifted from "a country of stagnation and poverty" to "a country of great power" as a result of its growing economic strength.

India has realized this remarkable economic development primarily because of its relatively stable "democratic" politics. What interests us is that the norms and morals that maintain the Indian economy and politics reflect traditional Indian thought and philosophical concepts such as *Satya* (truth), *Dharma* (morality or duty), and *Ahiṃsā* (nonviolence), which have been formed during India's long history.

Our project attempts to integrate the knowledge and materials on Indian philosophy and Buddhism accumulated during the 370-year history of Ryukoku University with the new findings of contemporary India studies, focusing on the "Living Tradition of Indian Philosophy in Contemporary India". To that end, we opened the Center for the Study of Contemporary India (RINDAS), in collaboration with the National Institutes for the Humanities, for five years from April of 2010 through March of 2014.

Unit 1 Politics, Economy and Philosophy of Contemporary India

Unit 2 Social Movements in Modern India Across Borders

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The Lost Age of Reason: Navya Nyāya and Indian Modernity

Jonardon Ganeri

The Lost Age of Reason: Navya Nyāya and Indian Modernity

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It used to be a commonplace in modernist studies, and remains one still in philosophical historiography, that modernity is something that happened first, and uniquely, in Europe; and attempts were made to convert the supposition into a tautology through definitions of modernity that exclude nonEuropean periodizations and geographies (for example, in terms of capitalist modes of production, the emergence of nation states and nationalist collective identities, the industrial revolution, secularization, and so on).¹ Progress of sorts occurred with the acknowledgement of the existence of alternative regional modernities, but the acknowledgement was tied to a centre/periphery model and to an associated ideology of European diffusionism. Eisenstadt (2000), for instance, is willing to acknowledge “multiple modernities”, but only insofar as these new modernities immitate and copy a first modernity centred in Europe. Post-colonial writers such as R. Radhakrishnan have struggled with what they term “the curse of derivativeness” (2002: 790), and have sought to find in the interplay between colonised and coloniser, between tradition and modernity, a more dialectical pattern of engagement. What I will argue for in this talk is a more radical rejection of the commonplace picture. I will claim that we should think instead of modernity as a happening potentially indigenous to any culture, irrespective of period or place, that like the famous Indian banyan tree it is “polycentric”, to borrow Susan Friedman’s very useful term. “The new geography of modernism,” Friedman says, “needs to locate many centres of modernity across the globe, to focus on the cultural traffic linking them, and to interpret the circuits of reciprocal influence and transformation that take place within highly unequal state relations” (2006: 429); it involves a recognition that these modernities are not derivative but different. There is only one way to substantiate such a claim, and that is through the detailed, painstaking, excavation of modernities that have been lost or lost sight of, and I will spend the remainder of this talk doing precisely that,

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¹ The following quotation is representative: “Historically, modernization is the process of change towards those types of social, economic and political systems that have developed in Western Europe and North America from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth” (Eisenstadt 1996: 1).

excavating an incipient early modernity in pre-colonial Indian philosophical theory. My previous paper (No.9 in this series) showed the idea of retrieval, the way past cultures of reasoning can inform new programmes of collective identity formation. The retrieval of a nonEuropean, pre-colonial modernity from Indian sources likewise has, I believe, the potential to inform the development of twenty-first century modernity in India and the diaspora.

The arrival of modernity at a certain point in the history of philosophy seemingly admits of two non-compossible explanations. One model presents modernity as involving a thorough rejection of the ancient—its texts, its thinkers, its methods—as starting afresh and from the beginning. This was how the two figures who are emblematic of the ‘new philosophy’ in Europe, Francis Bacon (1561–1626) and René Descartes (1596–1650), chose to present themselves.² A second model locates modernity not in a rejection of the past but in a profound re-orientation with respect to it. The ancient texts are now not thought of as authorities to which one must defer, but regarded as the source of insight in the company of which one pursues the quest for truth. This new attitude towards the texts does not imply abandonment but a transformation in their place within inquiry, a change in conception of one’s duties towards the past.

The first model has dominated the standard history of philosophy, which speaks of a revolution in philosophy in early seventeenth century Europe, one in which the Aristotelianism of the schools—with its obscure terminology, doctrine of forms and final causes, and schoolmen who “loved Aristotle more than the truth” (Mercer 1993: 34)—is cast aside in favour of a new mechanical conception of natural explanation. Recently, however, this familiar account has begun to unravel. John Cottingham says, for example, that “any picture of Descartes as a lone innovator setting out on a new quest for certainty cannot survive serious scrutiny” (Cottingham 1993: 150), while Dan Garber, pointing out that Descartes’ correspondents did not find his project seriously in conflict with their own progressive Aristotelian ambitions, speaks of “the revolution that did not happen in 1637” (Garber 1988). One of those correspondents, Libert Froimont, saw in Descartes’ account of himself in the *Discourse* the renewal of a very ancient spirit:

² Bacon: “There was but one course left, therefore,—to try the whole thing anew upon a better plan, and to commence a total reconstruction of sciences, arts and all human knowledge, raised upon the proper foundations.” (*Instauratio magna, Preface*; 1857–74, vol. 4: 8). Descartes: “As soon as I was old enough to emerge from the control of my teachers, I entirely abandoned the study of letters... For it seemed to me that much more truth could be found in the reasonings which a man makes concerning matters that concern him than in those which some scholar makes in his study.” (*Discourse*, AT vi. 9; 1984: 115).

I seem to see a Pythagoras or a Democritus, a voluntary exile from his homeland who has traveled to the Egyptians, to the Brahmans, and around the entire globe, to investigate the nature of things and the nature of the universe.³

New work has revealed a complexity in Descartes' relationship with late scholasticism, including a tension between the self-presentation of the *Discourse* and views expressed in his letters (Ariew 1999; Secada 2000). In another vein, Julian Martin has described Francis Bacon's self-depiction as "a studied pose," adding that "when Bacon painted himself and his natural philosophy as modern and novel, he was moved to do so by local concerns and ambitions" (Martin 1993: 74).

There can be no doubt but that the new philosophers in seventeenth century Europe were profoundly innovative, but the standard historiography simultaneously distorts two aspects of their relationship with the ancient. First, it misrepresents the dynamism and openness of progressive peripateticism. Many late scholastics, it is now becoming evident, were highly original in interpreting Aristotle and in fact saw no incompatibility between a re-cast Aristotelianism and the new philosophy (Schmitt 1983; Mercer 1993). The standard picture, furthermore, radically simplifies the complex ways in which the moderns drew upon the ancients. In the work of Leibniz, Spinoza, Basso, and Gassendi, what one finds is a firm conviction that there is truth in the ancient philosophers, truth which might well stand in need of radical rejuvenation and reconfiguration, but truth which provides a gateway to new philosophy and is not a road-block to it. Leibniz described himself as seeking a "reformed philosophy," one which put the mechanical philosophy on sound ancient foundations. Spinoza's engagement with ancient Stoicism has also, recently, begun to be more thoroughly explored and acknowledged (eg. Kristeller 1984). Susan James' assessment is that "much of the substance and structure of the *Ethics*—its central doctrines and the connections between them—constitute a reworking of Stoicism" (James 1993: 291). The fact is that the early modern philosophers had a far more subtle and interesting understanding of the relationship between their new work and the past than the standard model can accommodate. It is simply not the case that these early modern philosophers were merely residually scholastic; rather, a revival and retrieval of the ancient and a transformation of it into the modern was at the heart of their philosophical method. And that is not so different from those progressive Aristotelians who, says Leibniz, "draw from the springs of Aristotle and the ancients rather than from the cisterns of the Scholastics" (1956: 124).

When we come to look at early modern India it is especially important that we

³ Froimont 1637, quoted in Garber 1988: 476.

do so with eyes not blurred by the standard historiography of the battle between ancients and moderns in Europe. I am aware of no Indian thinker from the period who makes the sort of audacious self-proclamation that one finds in Bacon or Descartes, a sweeping dismissal of the ancient tradition and of everything associated with it. And yet a modernity there certainly was, one which had its equivalents of Leibniz, Spinoza, Basso, and Gassendi on the one hand, and Morin, Sennert, and Weigel on the other. I believe that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a remarkable project began to take shape in the Sanskritic philosophical world. It is not just that the philosophers are willing to describe themselves as “new,” though that is indeed a striking feature of the period. Yet others before them had done the same, and the question is in what this self-attributed newness consists and what the self-affirmation means. Was it only a newness in the ways that the ideas of the ancient authorities are described, a newness of style but not of substance? In asking this question, I have in mind Sheldon Pollock’s well-known assessment of the new intellectuals of the seventeenth century, that their work displays a “paradoxical combination of something very new in style subserving something very old in substance” (2001a: 407). That was certainly how a pre-modern, Jayanta, at the end of the first millennium, conceived of his own originality:

How can we discover a new truth? So one should consider our novelty only in the rephrasing of words.⁴

This characteristically pre-modern attitude of deference to the past changes fundamentally in the work of Raghunātha Śīromaṇi (c.1460–1540). Raghunātha belongs to a tradition of philosophical speculation known as Nyāya, a term more or less synonymous with the appeal to reason and evidence-based critical inquiry—rather than scriptural exegesis—as the proper method of philosophy. Raghunātha concludes his most innovative work, the *Inquiry into the Nature of Things*, with a call to philosophers to think for themselves about the arguments:

The demonstration of these matters which I have carefully explained is contrary to the conclusions reached by all the other disciplines. These matters spoken of should not be cast aside without reflection just because they are contrary to accepted opinion; scholars should consider them carefully. Bowing to those who know the truth concerning matters of all the sciences, bowing to people like you [the reader], I pray you consider my sayings with sympathy. This method, though less honoured, has been employed by wise men of the past; namely that one ask other people of

⁴ kuto vā nūtanam vastu vayam utprekṣitum kṣamāḥ | vacovinyāsavaicitryamātram atra vicāryatām || (Jayanta 1982: 1, v. 8). Though certainly exaggerated, Jayanta’s disclaimer is still less than that of the influential eighth-century Buddhist writer Śāntideva: “Nothing new will be said here; nor have I any skill in composition. Therefore I do not imagine that I can benefit others. I have done this [simply] to improve my own mind” (na hi kiṃcitapūrvam atra vācyaṃ na ca saṃgrathanakauśalaṃ mamāsti | ata eva ne me parārthacintā svamano vāsayitum kṛtaṃ mayedaṃ || (*Bodhicaryāvatāra*1.2).

learning to consider one's own words (*Inquiry* 1915: 79,1–80,3; trans. Potter 1957: 89–90).

The new attitude was summarised at the time by Abu'l Fazl, in a work—the *Āīn-i-Akbarī*—which relates the intellectual climate during the reign of the Mughal emperor Akbar. Abu'l Fazl describes the philosophers as those who “look upon testimony as something filled with the dust of suspicion and handle nothing but proof”.⁵ In the writings of those philosophers who follow Raghunātha from about the middle of the sixteenth century until the end of the seventeenth there is a fundamental metamorphosis in epistemology, metaphysics, semantics, and philosophical methodology. The works of these philosophers—some of whom lived in Raghunātha's home-town of Navadvīpa in Bengal, others in the newly invigorated city of Vārāṇasī—are full of phrases that are indicative of a new attitude, phrases like “this should be considered further,” “this needs to be reflected on,” “this is the right general direction to go in.” Openness to inquiry into the problems themselves, a turn towards the facts, is what drives the new work, not merely a new exegesis of the ancient texts, along with a sense that they are engaged in a radical and on-going project. The spirit which Raghunātha sought to provoke is clearly on display in a passage which asks about the meaning of historical and fictional terms:

How does it come about that, from hearing the word “Daśaratha,” people now, who never saw Daśaratha [the father of the legendary king Rāma] come to know of him? Likewise how, from the words [for fictional entities like] “hobgoblin,” do others come to know of them? I leave this for attentive scholars to meditate upon. I shall not expand further here. (*Inquiry* 1915: 60,4–61,4; trans. Potter 1957: 76).

Other branches of scholarship, including linguistics (*vyākaraṇa*), philosophical theology (*advaita* and *viśiṣṭādvaita vedānta*), ritual exegesis (*mīmāṃsā*), and jurisprudence (*dharmaśāstra*), encountered early modernity in ways that do not always agree that of the ‘new reason,’ the later *navya nyāya*. Particularly worthy of notice are the Kerala mathematical astronomers, whose sensational work is increasingly being appreciated.⁶

⁵ [1597] 1873: 537 (cited in D. C. Bhattacharya 1937). Abu'l Fazl does not mention Raghunātha in the list of philosophers he provides to accompany this description, Raghunātha presumably already dead when Akbar came to the throne; but he does name someone with close ties to Raghunātha, Vidyānivāsa, and he also mentions Raghunātha's best-known student.

⁶ Nīlakaṇṭha (1444–1545) and Jyeṣṭhadeva (c. 1530) are exemplary figures. Jyeṣṭhadeva's Malayalam *Rationales in Mathematical Astronomy*, for example, contains results, using methods closely analogous to the infinitesimal calculus, for computing the equation of centre and latitudinal motion of Mercury and Venus, derivations in spherical astronomy, and proofs of the infinite series for π , the arc-tangent and the sine functions. See Sharma, Ramasubramanian, Sriniva and Sriram 2008; Narasimha 2009. Raju 2007 presents the case for thinking that Keralan mathematics was transmitted to early modern Europe.

The existence of this modernity, I have emphasised, can be seen only when we free ourselves from the idea that modernity involves a complete rejection of the ancient sources. Our philosophers still, for example, write commentaries, and still use concepts and categories that might, if looked at from a distance, seem archaic. What must be recognised is that the mere activity of writing a commentary, though now strongly associated with conservative scholasticism, does not by itself tell one very much about the author's attitude towards the text being commented on. The fundamental role of a commentary was to mediate a conversation between the past and the present. It therefore offers us a route into the question that lies at the heart of *our* study of early modernity in the sixteenth and seventeenth century: the question of *their* sense of *their* duties towards, or separation from, the ancient philosophical world. There are different sorts of commentary, and a fundamental distinction is between those whose ambition is to clarify or systematize the "truths" already in the ancient treatise, and those which are using the treatise in the process of a creative pursuit of an inquiry into the truth itself. Modernity expresses itself as a distinctive way of reading the past, and in our period this also finds a voice in a new genre of commentary, the commentary which digs up the deep or hidden meaning (*gūḍhārtha*) in an ancient text. A mistaken understanding of the ambitions of commentary has also led to a tendency to read new developments back into the original works, with the result that the originality of the later thinkers tends to disappear from view.

Other works structure themselves as auto-commentarial glosses on groups of tersely stated principles (*sūtras*; *kārikās*), in a style familiar to historians of early modern European philosophy through texts like Spinoza's *Ethics* and Descartes' *Principles*. Raghunātha is, nevertheless, also striking in his new promotion of the genre of philosophical treatise in which a problem is discussed directly; his *Inquiry into the Nature of Things* is just such a work. In general, however, the discursive style in the works of the early modern Indian philosophers—mostly devoid of boastful self-assertion—can make it easy to overlook the originality of their ambitions.

Central to Navya-Nyāya, the 'new reason', were three ideas. The first was that methods of inquiry have to be evidence-based and collaborative, relying on proof-strategies that are open to empirical confirmation or disconfirmation and involving reasoned decision-making mechanisms in multi-agent environments. The second idea was that of a stratified or layered conception of the world, in which atomism at the lowest level is compatible with the reducible or irreducible reality of other categories of entity, including composite bodies, at higher levels. The third was that a new philosophy needs a new language, one in which the underlying logical form of

philosophical claims is exposed and transparent, and which can therefore serve the needs of demonstration in a calculus of relations. These key ideas—and the concomitant reworking of the ancient tradition they presumed—were all essentially in place by the middle of the seventeenth century. Indeed, we can read two very remarkable works of Jayarāma, the *Garland of Principles* and the *Garland of Categories*, as constituting a direct intellectual confrontation between the ‘new reason’ and Cartesian new philosophy. ‘Cartesian’ ideas are rejected in favour of a philosophy that could have held its own among any of the early modern philosophies of later seventeenth century European thought. Generally speaking, what we can say is that early modern forms of philosophical inquiry in India are governed by data drawn from logical form and linguistic practice rather than the microscopic and distal observation of natural phenomena. Philosophy in early modern India made the discipline rest instead on the sort of linguistic turn that characterised, much later, the origins of analytical philosophy in European thought. Bearing this point in mind, it is no surprise that profound affinities should have been discovered between early modern theory in India and twentieth century analytical philosophy (Matilal 1985, 1986).

It is of enormous significance that this should be a period of strong Persianate influence and Islamicate power. The problem is to square this fact with another: that one finds very few direct traces, if any, of Islamic or Arabic ideas in the work of the Sanskrit philosophers of the time. It is not at all similar to the situation in astronomy, for example, where the confrontation between ancient Hindu cosmological models and the new Arabic sciences is a topic of heated debate. In philosophy, the causality, if it exists at all, is much more indirect. The Persianate context nevertheless created incentives that had not existed before. One fact to note is that the brightest and best Sanskrit intellectuals were actively encouraged, for instance by Akbar’s great minister the Hindu Ṭoḍarmal, to learn Persian and join Mughal imperial office. Those who preferred instead to remain within the intellectual world of Sanskrit faced a very clear challenge to demonstrate the relevance and vitality of that world.⁷ They did this by drawing on its resources without burying themselves within its folds. If in Europe power lay with the Aristotelians in the university departments, in India it was located in the Islamicate administration. By not becoming a part of it, the new philosophers were, one could say, in a state of internal exile. Modernity was the alternative to

⁷ An example is Bhārat Candra Rāi, a prominent scholar in the court of Kṛṣṇa Candra. According to an early report, “his fondness for Sanskrit studies displeased his relations, who thought that an acquaintance with Muhammadan literature was a better passport to wealth and distinction than the Vedas and Purāṇas.” (Quoted in Wilson 1877: 155–6).

irrelevance. Another possibility is that rather than writing directly about Islamic thought they wrote instead about constructed surrogates within the Sanskrit milieu. In any case what is clear is that the sheer presence of alternative modalities of thought presented motivations and opportunities that could not have existed before.

Some of the most powerful intellects of South Asia were working in Vārāṇasī and Navadvīpa in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Among them were prominent contributors to the revitalised ‘new reason’, and it seems very probable that some would be among the “learned scientists” who associated with François Bernier.⁸ These philosophers were engaging in a profound and radical dialogue, with each other and with the tradition from which they had emerged. Educational networks centred on individuals and their families provided the structures needed for the ‘new reason’ to flourish in Islamicate India, but I will also argue that their very nature, particular the fiscal arrangements surrounding them, hampered as well as nurtured innovation. It is striking that several of the most original ‘new reason’ philosophers existed on the periphery of these structures, benefiting from them without being too closely implicated in their perpetuation.⁹ Others were able to participate in broader networks, such as those existing in Navadvīpa at the time of Raghunātha, or the type of informal umbrella of association created by a patron like Danishmand Khān, which “brought together a Frenchman of Paris, a Muslim of Persia and a Brahmin of Benares” (Gode 1954a: 376). In the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, the town of Navadvīpa, which is also known by its latinized name Nadia or Nuddea, was one of the great sites of scholarship in South Asia. Students from all over the subcontinent, indeed from Nepal and possibly even Tibet, were attracted to a strict programme of studies in the ‘new reason’, a vigorous intellectual community, and the eventual prospect of prestigious certification by title. The programme of studies was provided in ṭols run by a series of celebrated paṇḍits, whose more important works were frequently transcribed and swiftly distributed throughout India.

The context of these new philosophers is therefore quite different from an earlier phase of renewal within the tradition. When Gaṅgeśa writes in the fourteenth century, he is responding to a variety of pressures internal to the Sanskrit world, critiques that had been gathering force for some time. One critique came from the

⁸ Jayarāma, for instance, who knew Bernier’s discussant, Kavindra Sarasvatī, might well have been one of them. Bernier reports that he was introduced to “the six most learned paṇḍits in the town” of Vārāṇasī (1934: 342).

⁹ The story of Yaśovijaya Gaṇi provides another good illustration of this point.

direction of a rival philosophical theory about the nature of inquiry, developed within a context of defence of the legitimacy and authority of Vedic knowledge, Mīmāṃsā. If the Vedas are authoritative, then there is no question about the truth of the beliefs we form from them and no further project of verification. Such an attitude towards inquiry is profoundly at odds with one which sees the truth as a matter of discovery and confirmation. The other came from a challenge to the pluralist metaphysics of common-sense. Advaita Vedānta seeks to undermine the principle that appearance is trustworthy, and in particular that there is a world populated by middle-sized objects and known to a plurality of distinct cognizers; all there is, for Advaita, is consciousness, containing the world within itself. These internal challenges will lead Gaṅgeśa to bring to the surface two principles that had been less strongly emphasised before: a firm opposition to deference (an authority is not to be trusted just because it is an authority, but only when its credentials are in place; it is then apt, fit to be believed, *āpta*); and a robust commitment to the individual as a unit of intellectual, moral, and emotional life (the particular self— *ātman*—as a locus of psychological properties).

The two sources of internal challenge come both from rival Hindu theory. Gaṅgeśa's context was, in this respect, again very different from that of his predecessors, for whom the dominant intellectual circumstance was one fashioned by an intense and long-enduring dialectic with Buddhism (Matilal 1986; Ganeri 2007). It is entirely possible that it was precisely because Nyāya philosophers had configured themselves so as to be able to offer a robust answer to the Buddhists that their philosophy was left vulnerable to attack from rival theory closer to home, in the turf-war which became possible only after Buddhist philosophers were exiled.¹⁰ Be that as it may, and in spite of the description of his theory as “new,” Gaṅgeśa continued to be a pre-modern thinker in this sense: he writes to defend the ancient philosophy from rival critique rather than to channel its resources in the project of a new inquiry into the truth as such. Gaṅgeśa could not, as Raghunātha was to do, simply reject several of the ancient metaphysical categories on the grounds that they no longer made any sense. Nor could he bring himself to acknowledge new sources of knowledge and methods of inquiry. For all its originality, and despite of the fact that later thinkers look to his and Udayana's work as laying the foundations of the new Nyāya, neither Gaṅgeśa nor any of the philosophers who lived after him in Mithilā can be described as other than pre-modern. If we compare with the *via antiqua* and the *via moderna* in the Renaissance, where those who follow the path of “the ancients sought solutions to

¹⁰ One of the forms which that configuration took was an emphasis on a “medicinal” or “therapeutic” understanding of philosophy; see Ganeri 2007; Ganeri and Carlisle 2010.

contemporary problems in the works of classical antiquity...[while those who follow the path of] the moderns believed that contemporary thinkers had in some cases improved on the works of the classical writers” (Osler 1993: 131), then, in this terminology, Gaṅgeśa remains a *via antiqua* thinker while Raghunātha is the first to pursue a *via moderna*.

I believe that in a very complex political and intellectual climate the early modern ‘new reason’ thinkers were developing philosophical ideas of great radicality and originality, initiating a line of philosophical inquiry that did not so much run its course as was brought to a virtual stand-still, in the first instance by the collapse in stable Mughal power and patronage, and in the second by the disruption caused to established patterns for conducting and financing education by the British imposition of new fiscal arrangements and educational policies. Work in the ‘new reason’ continued into the nineteenth and twentieth century in an educational set-up now sharply bifurcated between low-prestige traditional networks and well-funded colonial colleges and universities.¹¹ Sheldon Pollock writes that “when colonialism made the norms of Europe the norms of India the Sanskrit intellectual formation melted like so much snow in the light of a brilliant, pitiless sun” (2001b: 24). I don’t see in contemporaneous European epistemology ideas so superior to the Indian ideas surveyed by Mahādeva as to have been powerful enough in and of themselves to accomplish this: what caused the dissolution of Sanskrit culture under colonialism was the dismembering of the systems of education and patronage that held that culture together, along with the simultaneous creation of well-funded colonial universities and colleges. More importantly, it was precisely the “norms of India”, its modern model of engaging the new in a dialogue with the old, of the outsider with the insider, which enabled it to emerge from British colonialism if not unscathed then at least uncrushed.

The construction in the nineteenth century of what I earlier called the “standard history” of early modernity fabricated a mythology which served to exaggerate and dramatize the differences between India and Europe.¹² The standard history about the distinctively European origins of modern philosophy in the seventeenth century was shaped, it seems, by distinctly nineteenth century needs. It

¹¹ See Krishna 1997c; 2001.

¹² Edmund Husserl, for example, identifies “Cartesian freedom from prejudice” as what distinguishes “European mankind” from India and the Orient (Halbfass 1988: 157). Gottlob Frege says that “in arithmetic, if only because its methods and concepts originated in India, it has been the tradition to reason less strictly than in geometry, which was in the main developed by the Greeks” (1950: §1).

is actually rather shocking that this history of the birth of modern philosophy continues to be taught uncritically in university philosophy departments still today.

Early modernity in India consists in the formation of a new philosophical self, one which makes it possible meaningfully to conceive of oneself as engaging the ancient and the alien in conversation. The Sufi Dārā Shukoh, Akbar's great grandson, is an exemplary early modern thinker, his belief that the Upaniṣads could be read as a commentary on the Qu'rān envisaged a relationship that was based neither on deference nor on rejection (Dārā Shukoh 1929, 1957). For Dārā the Hindu text was not an authority to which Islam must defer but a partner in a single quest for truth— his sectarian contemporaries' inability to make that distinction cost him his life. The Jaina Yaśovijaya is a quintessential early modern thinker too: in his case this was due to his search of a theory of individuals and community in which liberal political values occupy the centre stage. Yaśovijaya articulates a key feature of the early modern self when he says that public discussion must rest in balance, neutrality and an openness to the reasonable opinions of others.

What distinguishes the modernity of the 'new reason' philosophers is a new sense of one's duties towards the past. They saw themselves as engaging in "dialogues with the dead" (Curley 1986), not in deference, but to collaborate in a new search for the truth. I have characterized *early* modernity not as real modernity mixed up in a confused muddle with pre-modern habits, as many historians of early modern Europe do, but as the embodiment of a distinctive understanding of one's duties towards the past. The texts of 'new reason' philosophers are full of exhortations to the reader to direct their attention to what matters: "this should be thought about" (*iti cintyam*); "this needed to be pondered" (*iti dheyam*); "this is the direction [the reader should go in]" (*iti dik*). The *Inquiry* is a challenge: deliberately provocative, it led other philosophers to a far-reaching and sophisticated reformation of realism. The new spirit is succinctly captured by Veṇīdatta at the end of his *Embellishment of the Categories*. He appeals to a model of reasoning as "adaptation" (*ūha*), which has itself a long history in Indian thought, and claims that an adaptation of the ancient metaphysics is legitimate as long as it done on the basis of a proper deliberation (*vicāra*; Veṇīdatta 1930: 36). This is the *via moderna*, working with the ancients but not hamstrung by them.

I spoke at the beginning of Susan Friedman's coining of the term "polycentric modernities" to capture the idea that modernity has a spatiality and a geography, and should not be thought of simply in terms of periodization. "Rupture" is the term she prefers to characterise the onset of a new modernity, suggesting that "modernity

involves a powerful vortex of historical conditions that coalesce to produce sharp ruptures from the past that range widely across various sectors of a given society.... Across the vast reaches of civilizational history, eruptions of different modernities often occur in the context of empires and conquest” (2006: 433), and she stresses that a polycentric model “recognizes the modernities that have formed not only after the rise of the West but also before the West’s post-1500 period of rapid change—the earlier modernities of the Tang Dynasty in China, the Abbasid Dynasty of the Muslim empire, and the Mongol Empire, to cite just a few” (ibid.). She might as easily have cited examples from Japan. Modernity, and this is a point that has been made forcefully by Sanjay Subrahmanyam in his use of the term “conjuncturality”, is also characterised by the “intensification of intercultural contact zones... heightened hybridizations, jarring juxtapositions, and increasingly porous borders both characterize modernity and help bring it into being,” Subrahmanyam says, perfectly accurately, that “modernity is a global conjunctural phenomenon, not a virus that spreads from one place to another” (1998: 99–100). It has its own distinctive phenomenology too, the phenomenology of the new and the now: there is something that it feels like to be in the grip of modernity, incorporating “a gamut of sensations from displacement, despair, and nostalgia to exhilaration, hope, and embrace of the new”. “Modernity invents tradition, suppresses its own continuities with the past, and often produces nostalgia for what has seemingly been lost. Tradition forms at the moment those who perceive it regard themselves as cut off from it.” Friedman, I think, only oversteps the mark when she places too great an emphasis on the centrality of rupture, of a “dislocating break with the past”, citing with approval Paul de Man’s statement that modernity, “a ruthless forgetting” of the past, “exists in the form of a desire to wipe out whatever came earlier” (1983: 147–8). In this talk I have argued instead that it is better to see modernity as involving not radical rupture but a shift of allegiance, a new sense of one’s duties to the past, and a transition from deference to dialogue.

Appendix: A Chronology

- Until 11th Century. Nyāya philosophy develops in dialogue with Buddhism. Udayana and Vallabha are the last important voices.
- 12th Century. **Śrīharṣa** writes a set of sceptical “refutations.”
- c.1325. **Gaṅgeśa** writes the *Gemstone for Truth*, and a renovated Nyāya takes root in his hometown of Mithilā.
- 1460–1540. **Raghunātha Śiromaṇi** invents the ‘new reason’ in Navadvīpa, a town in Bengal. His immediate followers develop and teach his ideas both in Navadvīpa and also in Vārāṇasī.
1486. Birth of **Caitanya** in Navadvīpa.
- 1493–1519. Reign of the liberal sultan **Husain Shāh** in Bengal. His ministers include Rūpa and Sanātaṇa Gosvāmi, exponents of Caitanya’s Vaiṣṇavism.
1556. **Akbar** assumes the Mughal throne; the empire spreads throughout northern India. His ministers include the Hindus Man Singh and Ṭoḍarmal, both of whom encourage ‘new reason’ philosophers.
1582. Debate between **Vidyānīvāsa**, a ‘new reason’ thinker, and Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa at Ṭoḍarmal’s house.
1597. Abu’l Fazl writes the *Āin-i-Akbarī*, a synopsis of life at the time of Akbar. Several ‘new reason’ philosophers are mentioned.
1605. Death of Akbar. He is followed by Jahangīr r.1605–1627, Shāh Jahān r.1628–1658, and Aurangzeb r.1658–1707.
1613. **Roberto Nobili** writes the *Informatio*, containing a description of the new “natural philosophy.”
1615. **Dārā Shukoh**, eldest son of Shāh Jahān, born 20th March.
1620. **Francis Bacon** publishes the *Novum Organum*.
1621. **Sébastien Basso** publishes the *Natural Philosophy Directed Against Aristotle*.
1634. **Viśvanātha**, son of Vidyānīvāsa, writes a commentary on the Nyāya-sūtra.
1637. **René Descartes** publishes the *Discourse and Essays*.
1638. **Kavindra Sarasvatī** petitions Shāh Jahān to repeal a tax on Hindu pilgrims.
1650. Death of Descartes.
1655. Death of **Pierre Gassendi**. His protégé **François Bernier** is with him.
1656. Dārā Shukoh assembles a team of Vārāṇasī scholars to translate the Upaniṣads into Persian. Bernier arrives in India, and works as physician to Shāh Jahān and Dārā Shukoh.
1657. Leading Vārāṇasī intellectuals publically meet and sign a letter of judgement.
1659. Dārā Shukoh is sentenced for heresy and executed, after a conflict with Aurangzeb. The key ‘new reason’ philosopher **Jayarāma**, an acquaintance of Kavindra, finishes the *Garland of Categories*. He writes the *Garland of Principles about Reason* around this time too. **Raghudeva**, another ‘new reason’ philosopher, is doing similar work too and moving in the same circles in Vārāṇasī.
- 1658–61. **Danishmand Khān**, an accultured nobleman who opposes the execution of Dārā, takes on Kavindra, Bernier and others when they lose their patron. They exchange ideas, Bernier translating Gassendi and Descartes into Persian, Kavindra bringing Vārāṇasī thinkers and Bernier into discussion.
1660. Foundation of the Royal Society in London.
1670. Bernier, back in France, publishes his *Travels in the Mogul Empire*. Henry Oldenburg, the first secretary of the Royal Society, will arrange for their English publication; John Dryden bases his 1675 play *Aureng-zebe* on them.
1677. Death of **Spinoza**. The *Ethics* is published.
1678. Bernier publishes his *Abrégé* of Gassendi’s philosophy.
1688. Death of **Yaśovijaya Gaṇi**, a brilliant Jaina philosopher responds to the ‘new reason’ and perhaps also to Dārā’s project.
1690. **John Locke** publishes his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. He seems to have read Bernier’s *Abrégé*.
- 1690s. Several ‘new reason’ thinkers are active in Vārāṇasī: **Mahādeva** writes the *Precious Jewel of Reason*, and **Mādhavadeva** the *Essence of Reason*.
1707. Death of Aurangzeb.
1757. The Battle of Plassey.
1765. East India Company obtains taxation rights over Bengal.
- 1769–70. Great Famine, caused by punitive taxation and grain stock-piling.
1772. Britain, defeated in the American war for independence, turns its attention to India. Warren Hastings prepares a “plan for the administration of justice.”

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